Introduction: Continuities and Changes for an Alternative Modernity

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China has been rapidly propelled to global prominence in recent decades, largely due to its economic power rather than its political, military, or technological pre-eminence. China became the world's second largest economy in 2010, and the largest trading nation in 2013. Since the global financial crisis of 2008, China has been the largest contributor to world economic growth. With its growing economic influence, China has moved away from Deng Xiaoping's strategy of "hid[ing] our capabilities and bid[ing] our time" and taken a proactive stance in shaping the global economy. In 2009, China became the leading nation in the newly established BRICS group of countries. In 2013, China launched the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), in which 70 nations participate, including all G7 countries except the US and Japan. In the same year, China announced its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) for economic collaboration between Eurasian nations that covers 65 countries, but involved bilateral agreements with 133 countries by early 2019. However, as a developing country, China is at pains to manage its own transformation while trying to carve out an international identity amidst its growing global roles and external concerns over its rising influence.

Interpreting China in a global context

Understanding China and its trajectory of future development has been a major issue in international affairs, one that will inevitably have profound implications in the world for decades to come. Heated debates have occurred in recent years on the assessment of the domestic dynamics in China that might indicate what the country will become. These views range from Daniel Bell's "political meritocracy" (2015) to Tu Weiming's "cultural China" (2010), Martin Jacques's "alternative modernity" (2012), and David Shambaugh's "four alternatives" (2016). At the core of these studies is an appraisal of the roles China's cultural heritage and Western post-enlightenment values play in shaping its modern practices, institutions and beliefs; but also, more importantly, China's perceptions of and interactions with the Western-dominated modern world (Wu 2008).

As China started moving away from orthodox Marxist ideology in the late 1970s, cultural traditions have increasingly come to the fore of China's development model, with wider internal and external implications. Arguably, China's unique sense of history and identities may, over time, lead to a "contested modernity" (Jacques 2012) or "multiple modernities" (Mahbubani 2013) that are radically different from classical theories of modernisation and the convergence of industrial societies - a view that has been dominant since the 1950s. It has become clear western frameworks of interpreting China have proved largely inadequate as China is moving in a direction few in the west anticipated. China today resembles more its imperial past in governance style and power structure than any other models in the world.

The chapters in this book engage with these debates as contextual background in examining the cultural, social, and spiritual changes seen in China, with a focus on identity formation, self-perception, and the representation and communication of these changes. By considering the representation of Chinese society and its internal dynamics of change in the media, the book explores the emerging, multifaceted "China brand" situated at the juncture of past, present, and future, and between China and the wider world. It is concerned primarily with how hybridised identities are formulated, articulated, and communicated. It examines the way in which they are intertwined with situational, institutional, and societal dynamics of change, portrayed by a diverse array of image producers. However, more importantly, the book investigates how emerging identities that converge with or diverge from China's historical assumptions and beliefs are interwoven with China's evolving international outlook as China rises as a major global power.

Identity transformations: China's internal struggle

A crucial issue in China's modern identity has been the tensions and different modes of struggle between tradition and modernity. Despite the recent revival of traditional culture, China's modernisation process has been accompanied by intermittent but fierce attacks on tradition. The moderate cultural leader Hu Shi (1891-1962) posed a perceptive question in 1917 that is as relevant today as a century ago: "[T]he real problem therefore may be restated thus: How can we best assimilate modern civilization in such a manner as to make it congenial and congruous and continuous with the civilization of our own making?" (as quoted in Schwarcz 1991, 95). In the constant wrecking of the past in pursuit of modernity that took place during the 20th century, congeniality and congruence were never achieved. Since the 1911 Xinghai Revolution modern identities have been intricately dependent on interpretations of traditions. In imperial China, tradition took the place of religion. Tradition was the source of moral values, guidance, authority, and legitimacy. Historical memory, as the textually anchored attachment to shared experiences, nourished the spirit of the Chinese literati class who sustained the Chinese empire. History, as accumulated traditions, carries weight in the modern construction of authority in a different way—the appeal of defensive nationalism as a rallying call to mobilise support and solidarity for the political project of nation-state building. However, political and ideological battles have been fought over the role of traditions in differing visions of modernity by various national leaders, from Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek to Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. The current leader, Xi Jinping, attempts to combine socialism with tradition in an innovative manner: "Socialist culture with Chinese characteristics is rooted in our brilliant traditional culture refined over 5000 years of Chinese civilisation" (Xi 2017). Traditions are seen not only as congruent with socialism, but as constituting its cultural foundation.

As part of his report to the 19th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in October 2017, Xi's remark quoted above carries extra weight as a policy guideline for the future. It is part of China's renewed effort to underline the power of culture in national development and international politics. In the same report, Xi (2017) stresses culture as "the soul of a nation": "A nation thrives when its culture thrives. A nation is strong when its culture is strong". Traditional culture has become a vital part of China's soft power building strategy. Dirlik (2012, 37) sees this national renewal as part of a global resurgence of indigenous claims to "ways of seeing" and "ways of knowing". Paradoxically, the appeal to tradition and the return to classical epistemology to reaffirm national heritage are products of modernity. It is natural,

therefore, that China's early-stage socialism remains largely abstract and theoretical, while strategies for reviving traditional culture are specific, detailed, and substantial, endorsed by intellectuals and the public. However, history is not simply the past, but a purposeful assembly of materials from the past to construct the future. History is a process of selective exclusion in the creation of the new and therefore remains open to constant revision and contestation (Glassie 1995). It is significant that there is actually no agreement about modernity and its meanings in China. This "conceptual incoherence", as Dirlik observes, demonstrates Chinese modernity exists only in relation to Euro-American conceptions of modernity (Dirlik 2002, 29). It is the negotiation of the meanings of modernity that created a unique space to think about the past, the present, and the future.

Structure of the book

This volume consists of three sections. Each examines a distinct domain of identity transformations. **Section 1** *Chinese Society between Traditions and Modernity* (Chapter 1-4) looks at issues of dilemma in developing a modern society, focusing on traditional values as cultural legacy, the creation of a common speech (*Putonghua*), possibilities of a civil society, and revival of traditional identities. In **Chapter 1** "Rupture in Modernity: A Case Study of Radicalism in the Late Qing Chinese Press Debate", Qing Cao examines the historical roots of modern identities by discussing a crucial historical moment in the early 1900s when China broke with its age-old traditions in pursuit of modernity. From the perspective of organic society, Cao analyses the 1905–1907 press debate between monarchists and republicans as a case study to illustrate the radicalising tendency of the intellectual elite in their advocacy of new values, institutions, and practice. Cao considers how the negation of Chinese traditions laid the foundation for the radicalism that became prevalent throughout the century. The chapter summarises the discourse of radicalism as characterised by the lack of social anchorage, the loss of a benchmark in social practice and institutions, and coercive language in enforcing utopian visions of the future. Central to the rise of radicalism, Cao argues, is the shattered link between external values and indigenous practice. Cao postulates that the break constitutes a critical rupture in Chinese modernity which the current political elite must deal with in order to achieve the intellectual and emotional integrity of the Chinese cultural self. This chapter sets the scene for the rest of the book, which deal with contemporary materials in discussing a variety of dimensions of modern identities and their relationships with tradition, focusing on their negotiation and contestation in a globalised context from different perspectives.

In **Chapter 2**, "Putonghua and Language Harmony: China's Resources of Cultural Soft Power", Natalia Riva considers the role of language policy in China's projection of soft power. By examining the Party-State's discourse in these two policy areas, Riva considers s how the Chinese leadership targets the domestic audience in promoting a higher level of loyalty to Chinese culture and its system of values. Central to language planning as a regulatory framework, Riva argues, is the Party-State's vision of harmonising China's language as cultural capital to enhance national cohesion. Language policies targeting a multi-ethnic, multicultural, multilingual, and multidialectal China testify to how exploiting language resources has become instrumental in developing cultural capital as an important mode of nation building. Riva concludes that promoting Putonghua, or Standard Mandarin, as a means to address multifarious language issues only responds to the need to strengthen the country's cultural power, social harmony, and modern identity as essential components of China's comprehensive power, nationhood, and sovereignty. The Party-State's vision

of language as producer of cultural capital is, however, deeply immersed in a propaganda-type narrative which, through its link to the discourse of cultural power enhancement, attempts to address problems concerning people's cultural identity and ethnic roots. Thus, Riva contends, the cultural soft power narrative becomes a useful discursive tool to present actions aimed at maintaining political cohesion and consensus in a positive light.

Ian Weber examines the use of the Internet and mobile media by Chinese middle class and its impact on the development of a possible civil society in **Chapter 3** "Mobile, Online, and Angry: The Rise of China's Middle Class-led Civil Society?" Framed within social theories, Weber uses a cross-case method to compare the online and mobile social activism in Shanghai, Xiamen, Tibet and Xinjiang to investigate the dynamics of global online media within a localised context. It probes how the expanding cyber space is instrumental to constructing and transforming fresh social practices and identity with important implications on the nature of the Chinese society. Weber concludes the impact of online social actions and protests by the middle class on the development of civil society is limited. While the middle class may not be politically docile and can achieve social change, they do so primarily for self-interest, managing protests carefully so as to continue to reap the economic rewards of state capitalism and of political stability. Consequently, any move towards democracy facilitated through online and mobile communication will be slow and carefully managed in a way that benefits the government and the current power structure in China, particularly when it involves politically and socially sensitive issues such as sovereignty. In **Chapter 4**, "The Return of the Repressed: Three Examples of how Chinese Identity Is Being Reconsolidated for the Modern World", Hugo de Burgh and David Feng turn to the dynamics of identity change. They assess the significance and impact of the revival of Confucian values, which have largely displaced Marxist orthodoxy in recent decades. They examine the re-emergence of Confucian epistemology in three areas: the reinstallation of reverence for Confucius, the enthusiasm for the classic canon that has developed from a grassroots movement into a government policy, and the way in which the presentation and content of public slogans have changed to reflect Confucian morals. De Burgh and Feng argue that the way in which cultural change and self-perception occurred indicates that the authorities have largely acceded to the aspirations of the people. In seeking an alternative modernity, China has revised and modernised its traditional culture - the burgeoning fruits can be seen in the discourse and behaviour of its political and intellectual leaders.

Section 2 *Negotiating Identities in Moving Images* (Chapter 5-9) explores identity formations, contestations and circulation through visual images, focusing on television and films. In **Chapter 5**, "Becoming Global, Remaining Local: The Discourses of International News Reporting by CCTV-4 and Phoenix TV Hong Kong", Doreen Wu and Patrick Ng investigate two major broadcast channels in Greater China in their projection of pro-government discourse accentuating the notion of 'harmony'. They consider the extent to which the local and global norms and values are mediated through the discursive practice of journalism in three areas: the nature of reported news events, the stance adopted in reporting, and the recurring rhetorical patterns. They contend that globalization in the broadcasting practice has taken place only marginally, mainly in formats and styles. In projecting a global vision and readiness for change, these broadcasters no longer evade news of a negative nature and have largely adopted the globally prevalent pattern of a dialogic news, though more evident in the *Phoenix TV* than *CCTV-4*. Nonetheless, the traditional value of harmony has become central to the normative journalistic practice. The cultural category of harmony is accentuated to

construct a sense of normality, stability and positivity. Global and domestic change is therefore managed through the paradigm of continuity within the existing sociopolitical parameters.

Chapter 6 "Shanghai Cosmopolis: Negotiating the Branded City" turns the critical gaze to the visual representation of modern identity through city branding. Duncan Harte explores the official promotion of Shanghai as China's cosmopolitan and global gateway. Drawing on Lefebvre, Harte sees Shanghai rebranding as a hegemonic process to foster a dominant understanding of its cosmopolitan identity as fashionable, civilised and international, though the process is instrumental to reaffirming the CCP legitimacy and attracting inward foreign investment. Considering Kevin Kai Huang's film *Park Shanghai* as problematising Shanghai's brand image, Harte analyses the film as offering a localised and potentially subversive knowledge. Combined with other localised self-expressions, Harte details bottom-up activities as contestations and negotiations over the terms of Shanghai's cosmopolitan identity. Returning to television in **Chapter 7**, "Promoting Moral Values through Entertainment: a Social Semiotic Analysis of the Spring Festival Gala on China Central Television", Dezheng Feng probes the issue of promoting state-defined national identity through moral indoctrination in television. Using the annual televised Spring Festival gala as a case study, Feng delineates ideological enunciation of 'personal morals' as part of national 'core socialist values' – 'patriotism', 'dedication', 'integrity' and 'kindness'. These values, Feng concludes, are pervasively articulated in primetime television to implicate a national audience into the officially sanctioned modern identity enacted through state-prescribed moral behaviours. Aided by multi-dimensional semiotic symbolism, such values are simultaneously embedded in all aspects of the gala to maximise their persuasive effect. The most-watched TV entertainment programme is therefore transformed into an ideal platform to bolster official 'values' as a national project in a spectacle comparable to the 2008 Beijing Olympics opening ceremony.

The next two chapters look at cinematic representations of the fluidity and complexities of identities, revealing the negotiations, ambiguities, and tensions of identity formation in intercultural and interethnic contexts. Common to the film narratives is the role of the state in promoting a uniform industrial modernity in a single-minded push for urbanisation, marketisation and globalisation. In **Chapter 8** 'Chineseness' and Divided Loyalties: *My American Grandson*", Cynthia Qijun Han problematises the notion of "Chineseness" as a discursive site of identity construction. Scrutinising the transnational film *My American Grandson*, Han analyses the transformation of Chinese American identity in a process of "unlearning Americanness" experienced by an American Chinese boy during the visit to his grandfather in China. Conversely, a parallel process of "unlearning Chineseness" occurs in the transformation of his grandfather as he grows closer to his American born grandson. The mutual transformations, argues Han, reveal identity formation as a fluid, negotiated, and open-ended process. Moreover, Han highlights the boy's transformative movement in his ancestral homeland not in the metropolitan Shanghai but in a traditional village. It is in the simplicity and spontaneity of traditional life that the foreign-born Chinese boy feels the joy of homecoming and belonging, amidst family kinship, bonds, and filial loyalty. In what Han calls the "symbolic triumph of the countryside", the dilemma and conflict of identity evaporate in primordial human relationships. The metropolitan Shanghai with its glittering modernist façade, in contrast, contributes to a sense of alienation. Loyalty, like identity, Han concludes, is constituted primarily by natural human bond one develops with the social world.

Continuing the critique of the controversial role of modernity in its multifaceted guise, Shaoyan Ding, in **Chapter 9** "Articulating Tibetan Experiences in the Contemporary World: A Cultural Study of Pema Tseden's and Sonthar Gyal's Films", discusses the convoluted process of modernisation in Tibet amidst the materialist thrust of development, social anxiety, and identity change in ethnic minority films. Focusing on cultural hybridisation as a negotiated compromise between Tibetan traditions and contemporary experiences, Ding examines the role of technology as a symbol of modernity that brings both convenience and destruction, contributing to a state of alienation by objectifying and instrumentalising human beings. Ding shows how ethnic Tibetan filmmakers articulate Tibetan experiences that subvert stereotypical images of the region. Tibet is therefore no longer seen as the internal other, the object spoken of by outsiders, but is speaking for itself. Their experiences are thus presented as dynamic, complex, and shaped by local, national and international dynamics. Tibetan identity, concluded Ding, is an unfinished story in the process of becoming amidst shifting situations, though its own voice has to be central to its formation.

In **Section 3** *Representing China in Texts and Symbols* (Chapter 10-13), the last four chapters discuss the discursive power of texts and symbols in shaping a collective identity. **Chapter 10** "The Language of Soft Power: Mediating Socio-political Meanings in the Chinese Media" considers Chinese formulations of soft power as coping with international competition and domestic challenges. Scrutinising official speeches, policy papers and academic writings, Qing Cao posits that Chinese conceptions of soft power differ crucially from those of Nye's in two ways. First, in contrast to Nye's soft power as an instrument of American foreign policy, Chinese soft power emphasizes its communicative values - to develop a shared internal understanding of forging a strong national cultural identity. Second, China's soft power is both internally and externally directed, i.e., striving for cultural rejuvenation as the basis for global influence as opposed to Nye's external-oriented soft power projection. Based on analysis of diverse understandings, interpretations and contestations of soft power, Cao concludes that developing a coherent national value system will provide the much needed ontological and epistemological underpinnings for China's stable development that will connect meaningfully with its own cultural heritages and global norms.

In **Chapter 11**, "Media Representations of China: A Comparison of *China Daily* and *Financial Times* in Reporting on the Belt and Road Initiative", Lejin Zhang and Doreen Wu explore China's self-perception as an advocate of international development and contrasting images between China's state media and external media about China's international identity. Based on thematic and lexico-grammatical analysis, Zhang and Wu examine the way in which *China Daily* projects a multicultural outlook in promoting the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) through a positive, harmonious though homogeneous image of international collaboration, mutual benefit, and national development. The portrayal of a benign industrialism contrasts sharply with that of the *Financial Times* that foregrounds competing voices and divergent interests of various groups and nations. The *Financial Times* thus projects China as a fearful mercantile empire, though an essential business partner with which to work. This view reflects a broader Western attitude towards China – a full economic engagement combined with a critical political distance. Such a conclusion resonates with the prevalent Western practice of separating socioeconomic and politico-strategic issues – the former being positive but the latter negative. The chapter highlights the gap between internal and external perception of China's international identity that explains much of the ambiguities and ambivalence in the way the West approaches China's international

initiatives, including the AIIB and BRI projects though with considerable national differences.

Chapter 12 "Conflicting Images of the Great Wall in Cultural Heritage Tourism" considers China's iconic Great Wall as a cultural capital for national identity construction. Using travel reviews, interviews, and regulatory documents, Jieyun Feng, Yanan Li, and Peng Wu appraise perceptions of the Wall by three key stakeholders - domestic tourists, business operators and government regulators. They find that rather than evoking emotive response to the iconic symbol, the Wall is mostly associated by tourists with the quality of tourism services. The government regulator is by contrast more concerned with the preservation of the cultural site, while commercial operators are motivated primarily by commodifying the lucrative heritage resources for profit. The tourist on-site inertia indicates an oversaturation of the Wall as symptomatic of China's civilisation, internalised by tourists long before their physical encounter with the Wall. Thus, all three stakeholders' attitudes point to the immense power of the Great Wall as a physical monument underpinning a shared national cultural identity. In **Chapter 13** "China's Current Discursive Governance: A Discourse Analysis Perspective", Jiayu Wang draws on Elizabeth Perry's idea of "cultural governance" to examine the CCP's political identity in its discourse of "effective governance". The analysis focuses on three discursive themes – deepening the reform, anti-corruption drive and the "new normal" economy. Central to the analysis is Wang's assessment of the way in which President Xi Jinping stakes the CCP's claim to the right to rule by responding to the perceived sociopolitical and economic issues of the day. The reliance on a cultural mode of governance is pronounced in the CCP's discourse of traditional epistemology as underlining pragmatic policies. Wang summarises three discursive strategies in deploying cultural governance for political identity construction - the invocation of politico-cultural ideology, the use of an "appraisal language" as value orientation and rhetorical rationalisation of legitimacy. Wang concludes the chapter with a critical evaluation of the role of language in facilitating cultural governance in the CCP's evolving political identity.

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